

As second special session begins, Olympia takes stock

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A handful of legislative victories, levy-reform talks and other updates from the special legislative sessions in Olympia.

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OLYMPIA — Lawmakers this week finished their first special legislative session and began a second one, with legislators and others taking stock.

The first special session wound down Thursday — like the year's regular 105-day session before it — with lawmakers [still disagreeing on a 2015-17 state operating budget](#).

Legislators are still being held in contempt of the state Supreme Court for not doing enough to fully plan for K-12 education funding per the court's McCleary decision.

Since much of that is tied directly to the budget, the state Attorney General's Office, which represents the state, filed an update Friday — also the first day of the new special session — asking the court to again delay sanctions against lawmakers.

The update asked the court to hold off “until the second special session has concluded,” according [to the document](#). It was a request similar to the one made at the end of the regular session in April — and in that instance, [justices granted a reprieve](#).

Another part of the McCleary decision relates to making changes in the way property-tax levies fund basic education, which [lawmakers have been discussing in recent months](#).

Those talks between lawmakers will resume Monday, according to Sen. Bruce Dammeier, R-Puyallup. Dammeier added that he hopes a new, bipartisan proposal could be introduced by the end of next week.

Sen. Kevin Ranker, D-Orcas Island, described the progress on talks between the two parties as productive.

“We are 95 percent there,” Ranker said.

“Collectively we’re getting to a place where we’re getting close on the policy and ... having thoughtful discussions on how to pay for it,” he added.

Lawmakers and Gov. Jay Inslee on Thursday summed up the first special session’s accomplishments by pointing to a handful of bills that passed last week. One was a transportation budget for current construction projects that also funds the Washington State Patrol and the ferry system.

The Legislature last week also passed a bill intended to comply with a federal judge’s order to reduce wait times for crime suspects who are waiting for [mental-health services to seven days or less](#).

But lawmakers failed to agree on another bill to change school-testing guidelines that would have helped about 2,000 students get diplomas this spring. House Bill 2214 passed by a large margin in the House, [but was tabled in the Senate](#).

One thing this year’s spring special sessions might not do is cost taxpayers more money.

The Senate and House often absorb the cost of the special sessions into their allotted budgets, according to Bernard Dean, deputy chief clerk for the state House.

For instance, the two special sessions held in spring 2013 cost \$215,420 for the state House, according to Dean. But no additional money was ever requested to cover those costs, he said.

“We don’t normally seek supplemental funding to pay for special sessions,” Dean wrote in an email. “We leverage savings from staff vacancies, under-expenditures in other areas or other efficiencies to pay for the cost of special sessions.”

Information from The Associated Press was included in this report. Joseph O'Sullivan: 360-236-8268 or josullivan@seattletimes.com. On Twitter [@OlympiaJoe](https://twitter.com/OlympiaJoe)